

ISRAEL & THE MIDDLE EAST

Allah Is a Zionist

The Quranic argument for Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel

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An 11th-century North African Quran in the British Museum.(Wikipedia)

Over the past 15 years, the political conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs has been reframed as a religious war in which leaders from Yasser Arafat to Hassan Nasrallah to Osama bin Laden have appealed to the authority of the Quran to support their goal of eliminating the State of Israel. The authority of the Quran has also been cited in support of a revisionist history that seeks to deny the historical connection of the Jewish people to the city of Jerusalem and to its holiest sites, including the Temple Mount. Ignorant of what the Quran actually says about Jerusalem, Western reporters have recently tended to ignore archeological and historical evidence and give equal weight to the supposedly competing religious narratives of Jews and Muslims: Jews are said to believe that

there was a Jewish temple in Jerusalem, while the Quran states that the historical and religious claims of the Jews are false.

The transformation of a political conflict over land into a religious war is one of the most dangerous and frightening goals of radical Islamist politicians—but it has nothing to do with the Quran.

Here the Italian Muslim communal leader and Quranic scholar Sheik Abdul Hadi Palazzi examines what the Quran says about the connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. Far from negating the historical claims of a Jewish presence on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the Quran actually confirms Jewish accounts of the building of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem and supports the Biblical claim that the land of Israel was given to the Jews by God.

1. Jewish sovereignty in Jerusalem

In August 2002, the Yasser Arafat-appointed “mufti of Jerusalem and the Holy Land,” Ikrima Sabri, told the Western media that “there is not even the smallest indication of the existence of a Jewish temple in Jerusalem in the past. In the whole city, there is not even a single stone indicating Jewish history.” By saying this, he confirmed what Arafat had already said to the London-based Arabic paper *al-Hayat* and reportedly repeated to Bill Clinton and Ehud Barak at Camp David: “Archaeologists have not found a single stone proving that the Temple of Solomon was there because historically the Temple was not in Palestine.”

In making such statements, Sabri and Arafat not only blatantly denied history, archeology, and the teachings of the Bible, but they also denied the words of the Quran. From the time of the Revelation of the Noble Quran until recently, all Muslims unanimously accepted that the *Haram as-Sharif*, or Holy Esplanade, on which the Dome of the Rock today stands is the same place where Solomon's and Zorobabel's Temples once stood. As a matter of fact, *Haram as-Sharif*, the Sacred Area of Temple Mount, includes a place called Solomon's Standpoint, or *Maqam Sulayman*—according to the Muslim tradition, Solomon used to sit there and supplicate while Hiram's masons were engaged in building the Temple. From that same place the Muslim tradition says that Solomon prayed to dedicate the House once it was completed and to intercede for those who will approach it for worshipping.

Accepting that Solomon's Temple was in Jerusalem is compulsory for every Muslim believer, because that is what the Quran and the Islamic oral tradition, called the *Sunnah*, teach.

In the Quran, *Surah Bani Isra'il* (the Chapter of the Children of Israel), verses 1-7, we find a description of Solomon's Temple and of how it was destroyed twice by the enemies of the Jewish people:

Glory to Him Who caused His servant [Muhammad] to travel by night from Masjid al-Haram [in Mecca] to Masjid al-Aqsa [in Jerusalem] whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who heareth and seeth everything. We gave Moses the Book [Torah], and made it a Guide to the Children of Israel, commanding: ‘Take not other than Me as Disposer of your affairs.’ O ye that are the offspring of those whom We carried [in the Ark] with Noah, verily he was a devotee most grateful. And We warned the Children of Israel in the Book, that twice would they do mischief on the earth and twice be elated with mighty arrogance. When the first of the warnings came to pass, We sent against you Our creatures [Babylonians], given to terrible warfare: they entered the very inmost parts of your homes, and thus the first warning was fulfilled. Then We did grant you the return as against them; We gave you increase in resources and sons and made you abundant in human power. If ye did well, ye did well for yourselves; if ye did evil, [ye did it] against yourselves. So when the second of the warnings came to pass, [We permitted your enemies] to disfigure your faces, and to enter your Temple as they entered it once before, and to bring to destruction all that fell into their power.

Imam Abu Abdullah al-Qurtubi, who lived from 1214 to 1273 and was one of the most authoritative medieval Quranic annotators, in his *Al-Jami' li Ahkam il-Qur'an*, or Encyclopedia of Quranic Rules, explains the context (*asbab*) of the verses by mentioning among other sources the authentic Prophetic tradition (*hadith*). He wrote:

Hudhayfah Ibn al-Yaman asked the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him:

‘I travelled more than once to Jerusalem, but saw no Temple standing there. What is the reason?’

The Prophet Muhammad replied:

‘Verily Solomon son of David raised Bayt al-Maqdis [i.e., Beth ha-Mikdash, the First Temple] with gold and silver, with rubies and emeralds, and Allah caused human beings and spirits to work under his command, until the raising of the House was completed. Afterwards a Babylonian King destroyed Bayt al-Maqdis and brought its treasures to the land of Babylonia, until a King of Persia defeated him and ransomed the Children of Israel. They rebuilt Bayt al-Maqdis for the second time [the Second Temple], until it was destroyed for the second time by an army led by a Roman Emperor.’

One can easily verify that Jewish and Muslim traditional sources are confirming each other: The Temple was built by Solomon and destroyed by a Babylonian king. A Persian king later defeated the Babylonians and ransomed the Jews, permitting them to return to the Land of Israel. The Temple was rebuilt but afterward was destroyed by the Romans. This Temple stood in the area referred to as *Beth haMikdash* in Hebrew and *Bayt al-Maqdis* in Arabic. Those political and pseudo-religious Palestinian leaders who claim that “there was never a Jewish Temple in Jerusalem” are surely aware that, in order to support their political claims, they are compelled to lie, hide sources, and contradict the letter of the Quran and the Islamic tradition.

An earlier Quranic exegete and jurist, Imam Muhammad ibn Jarir at-Tabari, who lived from 838 to 923, writes in his *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, or History of Prophets and Kings, that the same sacred area was the place where Jacob had his vision of the Heavenly Ladder:

When Jacob awoke he felt blissful from what he had seen in his trustful dream and vowed, for God’s sake that, if he returned to his family safely, he would build there a Temple for the Almighty. He also vowed to perpetual charity one tenth of his property for the sake of God. He poured oil on the Stone so as to recognize it and called the place Bayt El, which means ‘the House of God.’ It became the location of Jerusalem later.

In Jerusalem on a huge Rock, Solomon son of David built a beautiful Temple to expand the worship of God. Today on the base of that Temple stands the Dome of the Rock.

Historical negation of Jewish and Islamic sources concerning Jerusalem is recent and does not predate the PLO and its political propaganda. In 1932, during the British Mandate period, the Supreme Muslim Council of Jerusalem published a *Brief Guide to Haram as-Sharif* for Muslim pilgrims, written in English. “This site is one of the oldest in the world,” it says. “Its sanctity dates from the earliest times. Its identity with the site of Solomon’s Temple is beyond dispute. This, too, is the spot, according to universal belief, on which David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.”

Not only were Arafat’s minions and heirs in Jerusalem attempting to rewrite the history of Arabs and Jews in the region as told by others; they were also attempting to rewrite the history of Arabs and Jews in the region as told by Islamic Arab sources, too.

2. Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel

The Biblical notion that God granted the land of Canaan to the Children of Israel is confirmed by the Quran. In the Surah of Jonah, verse 93, we read:

We settled the Children of Israel in a beautiful dwelling-place, and provided for them sustenance of the best.

In Surah al-Ahraf (of the Barrier), verse 137, we read:

We made a people considered weak inheritors of the Land in both Eastern and Western side [of the Jordan river] whereon we sent down Our blessings. The fair promise of thy Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel, because they had patience and constancy, and We levelled to the ground the great works and fine buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected.

Surah al Maidah (the Table), verse 21, is the only passage in which the Holy Land is mentioned by that title (*al-Ard al-Muqaddas*). It refers to the words Moses spoke to the descendants of Isaac:

Remember Moses said To his people: ‘O my People, call in remembrance the favor of God unto you, when He produced prophets among you, made you kings, and gave You what He had not given To any other among the peoples. O my people! Enter The Holy Land which God hath written for you, and turn not back ignominiously [to this heritage of yours], for then will ye be overthrown, to your own ruin.

In a commentary of Imam Abu al-Qasim Mahmud al-Zamakshari, who lived from 1074 to 1144, titled *al-Kashaf*, or The Revealer, we read the following explanation:

As for the borders of ‘the Holy Land,’ some scholars says its northern border is the Mount [Hermon] and its surroundings, and for others in also includes a part of the Land of Sham [the Golan]. Others say it extends from the territory of the Philistines [Gaza] until Damascus and a part of Urvum. Some say that God presented to Abraham this Land as an inheritance for his children when he went up to the mountain and said to him: ‘Look around as far as your gaze can reach. Every place reached by your eyes will be theirs.’ The Holy Temple was the dwelling place of the prophets and the residence of the believers. ‘God hath written for you’ means ‘God swore it and wrote in the Divine Tablets of Predestination: that it is yours, belongs to your people and do not turn back from it. Do not be afraid of the Philistine giants who live there.

A similar note is also found in a commentary of Abdallah ibn ‘Umar al-Qadi al-Baidawi, who lived from 1226 to 1260, titled *Asrar ut-Tanzil wa Asrar ut-Ta’wil*, or The Secrets of Revelation and the Secrets of Interpretation.

3. Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel was never abolished

Moreover, the Quran explicitly refers to the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel before the Last Judgment when it says in the Surah of the Children of Israel, verse 104:

And thereafter We [God] said to the Children of Israel: ‘Dwell securely in the Promised Land. And when the last warning will come to pass, we will gather you together in a mingled crowd.’

Therefore, from an Islamic point of view, Israel is the legitimate owner of the land God deeded to her and whose borders were defined by Abraham in Genesis.

All recent claims according to which the “assignment of the Land of Israel to the Jewish people was withdrawn or abrogated” are bereft of scriptural or traditional evidence. The Quran mentions the territory that God assigned to the Jewish people, but neither it nor the traditional Islamic sources mention a supposed withdrawal.

Imam al-Qurtubi explains in al-Jami that the last promise concerning the return of the Jewish people “together in a mingled crowd” after the destruction of the Second Temple will be a sign that precedes the coming of the Messiah.

The Quran only mentions a double period of mischief and a double punishment with exile from the Land. God says:

We warned the Children of Israel in the Book, that TWICE would they do mischief on the earth and TWICE be elated with mighty arrogance.

According to this Quranic proof, the contemporary Zionist rebuilding of the State of Israel—the third entry of the Jews to their divinely appointed land—is not mischief but rather a fulfillment of what Imam az-Zamakshari reminds the Jews: “God swore it and wrote in the Divine Tablets of Predestination: that it is yours, belongs to your people and do not turn back from it.”

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